

VZCZCXRO5557
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHSI #0924/01 1351427
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 151427Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY TBILISI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1578
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 2276
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHUNV/USMISSION UNVIE VIENNA PRIORITY 0046
RHMFISS/US CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000924

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/15/2019
TAGS: [PARM](#) [PBTS](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: ARRIVAL OF RUSSIAN BORDER GUARDS IN
ABKHAZIA AND SOUTH OSSETIA

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary and comment. Two agreements signed April 30 by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Abkhaz and South Ossetian de facto "presidents" Sergey Bagapsh and Eduard Kokoity on "joint efforts for protection of state borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia," has further reinforced Russian control in the disputed territories. These agreements delegate to Russia the authority to protect Abkhaz and South Ossetian "state borders" until their own border guard services are established. The Government of Georgia strongly condemned the agreements, as did the U.S.; the EU and NATO also expressed their concern. Since the signing, the EUMM, UNOMIG, and OSCE have observed the deployment of Russian border guards along the Abkhaz and South Ossetian administrative boundary lines. The agreement is a further violation of the August 12 cease-fire agreement, which called for the removal of Russian troops to the positions held prior to the start of the conflict. End summary and comment.

REACTIONS TO THE AGREEMENT AND OVERALL OBSERVATIONS

12. (C) The agreements between Russia and Abkhazia and Russia and South Ossetia were signed for a period of five years with the possibility of automatic extension for another five years, unless either side decides to suspend it. Medvedev claimed the agreements were necessary to defend against terrorism and cross-border crimes. The United States, EU, and NATO expressed concern over the agreements and stated that they are an infringement of the six-point cease-fire agreement of August 12. The Georgian Foreign Ministry called the agreements provocative and a violation of the August 12 agreement and the principles of international law. National Security Advisor Eka Tkeshelashvili told PolOff that the Russian border guards were currently in the process of assuming control at the administrative boundary lines. She observed that on one hand, this could be seen as positive for the region, in that Russian troops are more professional and disciplined than the Abkhaz and South Ossetian militia; however, she also observed that being on the administrative boundary lines gives the Russians more of a pretext for taking military action, by claiming that they are protecting citizens. EUMM noted that they have observed the arrival of the Russian border guards in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and that the Russian border guards are clearly exerting control over the Abkhaz and South Ossetian militia. EUMM has also seen the arrival of engineering units, who are in the process of building new infrastructure.

OBSERVATIONS IN ABKHAZIA

13. (C) On May 2, General Anatoly Zaitsev, Abkhaz de facto "deputy defense minister," stated that Russian border guards had already begun to assume control of the "borders" and that necessary construction was also beginning. Chief of the

Border Control Directorate of the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation in Abkhazia, Major General Yuri Zviryk, held a press conference on May 6 and said that there were sufficient numbers of Russian border guards in Abkhazia to ensure a secure "border" and that sub-units would be deployed along the coast with a focus on historical sites and populated areas. Zviryk also noted that during the preceding week, Russian border guards had detained two vehicles and eight people for "border crossing" violations. On May 15, Abkhaz de facto "president" Bagapsh was quoted in Russian press as saying that the deployment of the Russian border guards in Abkhazia would be complete by the beginning of June and would include 800-850 personnel.

14. (C) UNOMIG has detailed specific examples of the arrival of Russian border guards along the Abkhaz administrative boundary line since the signing of the agreement. On April 30, a Russian convoy was observed at Sukhumi heading south. The Abkhaz de facto "ministry of defense" later clarified that the convoy consisted of Russian border guards to be deployed in the Gali region, noting that additional Russian border guards were also expected to be deployed there. Beginning on May 1 in several towns in the Gali and Zugdidi regions, UNOMIG patrols observed the Russian flag raised beside the Abkhaz flag for the first time since the withdrawal of the peacekeeping forces in October 2008. Patrols have also observed construction in progress at several Abkhaz observation posts, as well as the addition of new tents and an increased number of personnel. UNOMIG patrols have already established contact with some of the new Russian guards. On May 7, additional Russian border guards

TBILISI 00000924 002 OF 002

arrived in Abkhazia, and Zviryk stated that Russian border guards would assume authority for the entire 168 kilometer land "boundary" of Abkhazia, from the Upper Kodori Valley to Pichora in Gali District. UNOMIG observed more Russian border troops arriving May 9-11, and noted that more observation points were now under Russian command and new Russian positions were being established.

OBSERVATIONS IN SOUTH OSSETIA

15. (C) OSCE has observed evidence of new Russian positions and forces along the administrative boundary line with South Ossetia. On May 2, OSCE monitors reported large movements of armored vehicles, including BTRs and BMPs, between Tskhinvali and Akhmagori, which was thought to be a reflection of the implementation of the April 30 agreement. Throughout the first week of May, there were conflicting reports by the Georgian police in the area regarding the deployment of Russian border guards. However, on May 7 in Plavi, the Georgian police reported that they believed Russian border guards had replaced the South Ossetia militia. On May 8, the patrol observed the construction of a Russian post in Tsinagari. On May 9 at Ergneti, Russian armed forces personnel stated that Russian border guards would staff the checkpoints together with the South Ossetians, and in Odzisi, Georgian police reported that they had information that the checkpoint west of the Akhmadzhi bridge would be staffed by Russian border guards as of May 13. Echoing the National Security Advisor's comments, an OSCE monitor remarked to PolOff that the region has been quieter since the FSB arrived. (Note: The Border Guard Service of Russia is a division of the FSB, or the Russian Federal Security Service.)

TEFFT